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Why the 'birds people' of Kinangop grasslands will continue singing for Sharpe's Longclaw

Joan Gichuki

Joakim Kiiru can vividly remember the expansive green grasslands of Kinangop in the 1960s. Big rivers with clean water, lush green grass for livestock and thousands of beautiful birds are now a thing of the past. Out of 77,000 hectares of natural grasslands, only a small portion remains: much of the land is under intensive cultivation and continually fragmented due to population increase. Important biodiversity, including birds such as the endemic and endangered Sharpe's Longclaw, no longer enjoy a paradise but a shrinking area, threatening their own survival.

A view of the Kinangop Highland Grasslands with sheep grazing. Sheep rearing for wool is compatible with efforts to conserve this unique habitat of the endangered Sharpe's Longclaw. *Photo: C. Moore*

In the mid 1990s a group of community members formed a local conservation group, the Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FOKP) to promote conservation of the grasslands and key species and try to reverse the negative trends. The local community nicknamed the group the "birds people", meaning people who did not take development seriously but concentrated on watching birds! Since then, however, the group has put in place a number of interventions: construction of an Eco-Resource centre to promote environmental education and create awareness for the local community, schoolchildren and visitors on the importance of conserving the grasslands and their biodiversity; and development of alternative livelihood options including sheep rearing, wool spinning and weaving and beekeeping to help preserve many acres of private land for conservation.

As a new initiative for FOKP and Nature Kenya, two Nature Reserves were purchased. Recently, the Kinangop Leleshwa Nature Reserve, 51 acres in size, was added with support from the World Land Trust (WLT). The launch of the reserve coincided with the

cont'd on pg 2

Each year more and more of the sites migratory birds depend on during their journeys disappear.

Many aspects of human land use are extremely damaging to the birds' habitats, e.g urbanization, deforestation, mineral extraction can damage entire regions along the birds' route. Land reclamation and biofuel production remove or degrade crucial wetlands and other habitats for many migratory bird species.

While human survival depends on these transformations of natural areas, a sustainable use of land is vital to reduce the impacts on our natural resources, such as water, soil, nutrients, plants and animals – including migratory birds.

This year's theme for World Migratory Bird Day is **"Land use changes from a bird's-eye view"**. We want to raise awareness on the dramatic effects human land use has on migratory birds and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

Join us and others around the world and take part In World Migratory Bird Day on **May 14-15, 2011** through bird - watching and other public events.

However you decide to participate, your contribution will help make this campaign a success!

For more details, contact office@naturekenya.org or call 020 3537568 or 0771343138

Still on!!

...1st Annual General Meeting
of the East Africa Natural History Society

Wednesday 04 May 12:00 - 2.00 p.m.
Louis Leakey Hall, Nairobi National Museum

12.00 - 1.00 p.m. Bar-be-que
1.00 - 2.00 p.m. Meeting
From 2.00 p.m Selected Film

The AGM is being held at lunchtime this year, instead of after office hours because of the ongoing road construction on Museum Hill.

See you there....

action

Africa Regianal Committee of BirdLife meeting at the Kinangop Eco-Resource centre, and was attended by dignitaries and BirdLife Partner members. It was a big moment and a beautiful marning: the gigantic Aberdare Mountains seemed to be smiling, a white mist was rising above the vegetatian an the slapes, and a ray af sunlight pierced through the dark clauds. Lake Naivasha glittered in the distance.

The Chairman af the BirdLife Cauncil far African Partnership, Mourad Amari, launched the Kinangop Leleshwa Nature Reserve and thanked the World Land Trust for its crucial suppart. He also congratulated FaKP members far enhancing develapment in the area, building the capacity af its members, pramating lacal livelihaads and canserving grassland species. He added that Kenya was a good example of how local cammunities can drive the lacal conservatian agenda with suppart fram the natianal BirdLife Partner, in this case Nature Kenya.

Africa Regional Committee of BirdLife International and FoKP members pose for a photograph at the launch of Leleshwa Nature Reserve, Kinangop. Land was purchased through the World Land Trust. Photo: M. Nzisa.

Participants on a birdwalk around the newly launched Leleshwa Nature Reserve Photo: M. Nzisa.

The Variable Reed Frog: The reserve is a hot spot for unique plant and animal species. Photo: M. Nzisa.

The purchase of the Kinangop Leleshwa Nature Reserve by WLT has already braught a lot of satisfaction ta the local community. As I walked to the Eco-Resaurce Centre, I cauld see the jay in their faces. The lacal leaders and cammunity members na langer need to be canvinced that birds can bring develapment ta the peaple and impartant visitars ta Kinangop. They have found out that bird tourism is as important as the big game that Kenya is known far. Other key attractions in Kinangop include a cultural museum in the Eco-Resource centre, calanial settler hauses, caves that were used by Kenya freedam fighters and mauntain climbing.

Kenyabirdfinder: Printing and Saving Checklists

Kenya Birdfinder is a database, which allows you to easily record your bird records, print them as a list, and send them to your friends to show off! If you are going somewhere new and would like to see what birds you might find there, you can print off a checklist from that location. It has other useful applications such as allowing researchers ta find aut where a specific bird species has been found, or whot birds ore faund in o porticulor locatian. In the future, we hope to use the records in a new Kenya Bird Atlas.

Today, I om going to show you how to print out or save lists in Microsoft Word or Excel. If you have not yet registered, you will hove to do thot before you follow the instructions below. I have alreody explained in an earlier Nature Net, how to register and use Kenyabirdfinder but for those who need more information on this, please contact me on darfreid@hotmail.com.

First sign into your account in Kenya Birdfinder by following this link http://www.worldbirds.org/v3/kenya.php?a=lo It is quite complicated so if you are feeling particularly untechnical you can contact me and I will send you the link and you can just click on it! Then save this link as a favourite for further use.

To moke a list of birds from a location you are about to visit, for example for the Aberdares National Park, follow these steps:

1. Log in and go to the main page (Visit Highlights).
2. Click on the Reports link on the left hand menu.
3. In the next page (Reports) click on Location Summary Report
4. The next poge is titled Location Selection. In the Location box, type the first 3 letters of the location you want, in this case it would be abe.
5. Click search.
6. Aberdare Mountains IBA comes up as one of the choices, so click in the little left-hand box beside it to select it, and click on Run Report.
7. You will now get a Location Summary Report page, with all the records of the birds entered inta the Kenyabirdfinder data base far the Aberdares.

Above the bird list in the Location Summary Report are some options for you to work /play with. Google is fun but we can talk about thot later!

You con now a) Print, b) Sove to Micrasoft word and then print later, or c) Download to Microsoft Excel

a. Click the Print option, ond a complete list con be printed from your computer by following the instructions in the box that pops up
b. Open a new Microsoft Word document. Click the Print option above, then right click in this print box and choose Select All. Right click again, choose Copy and then paste this into the Word document. Save as a checklist for the Aberdares National Park. (This is the way I save and send my own lists)
c. Click the Download option. The list will now come up as an Excel file, which you can save onto your computer. Easy!

One word of caution, however. The data found on Kenya Birdfinder is in the process of being monitored, and it may contain errors. Please report any errors you see to me and, if you feel confident enough, you can always volunteer to help monitor the records.
Fiona Reid

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Go out and Look!

at the Evening Sky

Fleur Ng'weno

Choose an evening with no clouds or few clouds, and look up at the dark sky after sunset. Can you find the moon, stars and planets as mentioned below?

May stars, 2011

The ancient Greeks gave names to the patterns formed by the stars, called constellations. As Kenya is on the equator, we see most of the constellations of the northern and southern hemisphere.

A famous constellation of the north is Ursa Major, the Great Bear, also known as the Plough or the Big Dipper. To see it, turn towards the north (to the right of the sunset). Look for three bright stars in a line, next to four stars forming the corners of a box shape.

Opposite the Plough, to the left of the sunset, is a famous constellation of the south, the Southern Cross. Look for three bright stars and a fainter fourth star forming the shape of a Christian cross. There are two very bright stars to the left. At sunset in May, the Cross is low in the southeast and tilted to one side. It straightens up during the evening.

The planet Saturn is high in the east, opposite the sunset. It glows with a bright, steady golden light. To the right (southeast) of Saturn, the bright star Spica is sparkling and blue-white in colour. Left of Saturn, low in the northeast, the very bright star Arcturus is sparkling and orange. The moon is above Saturn and Spica on May 14.

The constellation of Leo the Lion is high in the west. Look for stars forming a line like a crescent – the lion's mane. Use your imagination to see the rest of the constellation, a resting lion.

Sirius, the brightest star, is low over the sunset.

Planets, May 2011

Four planets put on a great show in the pre-dawn sky. As May begins, Venus is brilliant in the eastern sky, with the crescent moon nearby. The tiny planet Mercury, rather bright this month, is below Venus. Bright Jupiter and faint, reddish Mars are low over the sunrise.

The four planets remain close together for most of May. Jupiter rises steadily, passing Mercury on May 10 and Venus on May 11. Venus and Mercury begin to dip back towards the horizon. Venus passes Mars on May 22. At month's end Jupiter is high in the east, followed by Mars, Venus and Mercury.

Moon, May 2011

May 3, new moon (look for crescent moon over the sunset on the 4th). May 10, first quarter ("half" moon overhead at sunset). May 17, full moon rises in the east opposite the sunset. May 24, last quarter ("half" moon overhead at dawn). New moon on June 1st.

SPOTTED!!

Tommy's first steps....

Rare picture of a just born baby Thomson's Gazelle at Nairobi National Park by Eric Kihiu.

Send US your INTERESTING and AMAZING nature photos through communication@naturekenya.org and we will get you printed.

A flock of Black-winged Stilts P. Wairasho

Invest in the future of our natural environment by leaving a living legacy in your will – Enquiries will be kept confidential

in the field

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet EVERY WEEK at 8:45 am in the Museum staff car park. The entrance is on Kipande Road.

Sunday Birdwatch (also called "Pot-luck Outings") meet the THIRD Sunday of each month at 9:00 am at the same location. Bring lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks Contact Marlene Reid through <donreid@africaonline.co.ke> or call 0720-949195 for more information.

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Bronze Sunbird on Leonotis by Peter Usher

Bird-ringing: Please note that ringing takes place on Tuesdays at 8 a.m.

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 a.m. Contact Simon 0729-840715

MAY 2011 AT A GLIMPSE

May 4 Morning Birdwalk
May 7 FoCP Nature Walk
May 11 Morning Birdwalk
May 14 FONA Tree Walk
May 15 Sunday birdwatch
May 18 Morning birdwalk
May 25 Morning birdwalk
May 26 FONA Public Lecture
May 30 FONA Tree Walk
May 31 Morning birdwalk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums)

In Loving Memory

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Tim Campbell who died on 11th May in the United Kingdom. Tim and Lise have been strong supporters of Nature Kenya and are Life Members. Tim will be remembered for his botanical illustrations, some of which are on the cover and inside of Upland Kenya Wild Flowers by Andrew and Shirley Agnew and for his photographs in The Wild Flowers of Kenya by Michael Blundell. We send our heartfelt condolences to Lise.

Asha Owano
Chief Librarian, NMK
by
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